

## VENUS ENVY (OR, FIRST COME, FIRST SERVE)

Somebody told me there was this poetry outfit over in Seattle which put out a review each year. If you sent them so many copies of your work they'd staple everything together and put it out. This sounded reasonable. It also sounded like the only way I was likely to see anything of mine "in print." So I went to the local copy place and made the required duplication of eight of what I considered to be among my ugliest and least publishable pieces.

When the review came out a few months later they sent me four copies. I read through the thing and determined that mine were easily the best among a lot of generally hopeless word slag. I also noticed that I had neglected to attach my name to my stuff, a typically unconscious bid to forever remain anonymous. Anyway, accompanying the volumes was an invitation to come to Seattle and read my work at a bar which this outfit operated.

I had never read my work in public but I figured maybe I'd give it a try. So I drove over to Seattle on Sunday, armed with a sheaf of recent work and, as I have always suffered paralyzing stage fright, a pint of bourbon which I consumed sitting in my car on the ferry.

The bar was located in a fairly seedy section of the city, beneath the monorail. It was unbelievably smoky inside as I signed my name on the list to read. The readings appeared to be conducted on a first-come, first-serve basis. I sat at the bar and drank beers as the readers followed one another to the podium and did their stuff.

It was all really pretty awful, though not as bad as the stuff in the review. One guy was actually quite funny in his shattered self-deprecation, and another guy — the "celebrity guest" for the evening — displayed some sort of academic grasp



of the medium,  
for whatever that was worth.

Then a young woman with the rattiest, filthiest blonde hair  
I'd ever seen and various  
rings and studs perforating her face  
stepped up to the dais.  
She was quite beautiful in a  
ruined sort of way, gray eyes heavily lidded  
and with deep blue circles beneath them.  
She wore a floor-length black fur of some sort  
which I thought I could smell from where I was seated  
at the bar.  
She started reading in a low, scratchy monotone  
never looking up from the podium.  
It was a straightforward prose piece,  
actually a description of her picking up a guy  
at this very bar,  
and going with him to his loft  
to read his "poetry."

As she approached the part in the piece where  
he stopped reading his poetry to her  
and began making his move on her  
she put her hand inside the fur and began  
handling herself.  
The fur came open enough to reveal she was wearing  
nothing underneath.  
Her hand moved down to her pussy,  
though my view was obscured somewhat by the podium.  
She brought herself off as she described  
the young poet performing oral sex on her.  
It was all artfully synchronized  
and the room,  
as they say,  
belonged to her.

Following a brief, rapt pause,  
she pulled her fur back together  
and left the bar, followed by several aesthetes  
who had obviously been impressed  
with her work.

Then,  
naturally,  
my name was called.